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**Author:**  
Mayibongwe.maqhina

NATION

## Cyril's 3% pay hike for public office bearers leaves unions outraged

MAYIBONGWE MAQHINA

mayibongwe.maqhina@inl.co.za

APART from coughing up R21 million in rates and services for unoccupied government properties, taxpayers will now have to bear the cost of the 3% salary increase for all public office bearers.

President Cyril Ramaphosa signed off a 3% salary increase for all public office bearers with backpay dated to April 2022.

Spokesperson Vincent Magwenya said on Saturday that Ramaphosa made the salary determination following recommendations by the Independent Commission for the Remuneration of Public Office Bearers, submitted in April.

"The commission recommended a 3.8% salary increment for all public office bearers, including members of the Independent Constitutional Institutions, judges, magistrates and traditional leaders for the financial year 2022/23.

"Having considered the commission's recommendations ... the President has decided that the salaries of all public office bearers be increased by 3%."

Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana had during the commission's consultation proposed a 1.5% increase plus a once off cash gratuity to all categories of public office-bearers, offered to senior management staff in the public service.

The salary increase comes against the backdrop of millions spent by the government on unoccupied properties.

Replying to parliamentary questions, Public Works and Infrastructure Minister

Sihle Zikalala said the total amount of rates and taxes paid on unoccupied properties was R21 735 435 from April 2022 to May 2023.

"The department is in the process of letting out its unutilised state owned properties to interested investors."

Zikalala added that 466 residential properties were unused and or/without any lease agreement. He put the figure at 1 796 for unused farm properties.

"Currently the department is implementing an intensive drive to let superfluous vacant properties not presently needed for service delivery objectives of the user department," Zikalala said.

Cosatu's Matthew Parks said the labour federation noted with grave disappointment the decision by Ramaphosa to grant all public office bearers and judges a 3% salary increase.

"This is a tone deaf and embarrassing decision that should have been rejected by Ramaphosa.

"Most galling is that the president chose to ignore the recommendation by the Treasury for a 1.5% increase for political office bearers and judges and instead opted to increase it to 3%.

"It is hypocritical for the government to implement a 3% increase for political office bearers and judges to avoid them 'becoming demoralised' while it has shown little compunction for imposing wage freezes and below CPI increases on police, nurses and doctors," he said.

It was about time that the terms of reference of the Independent Commission for the Remuneration of Public

Office Bearers be extended to require it to consult with the public and not only members of Cabinet, who have a direct conflict of interest in its recommendations, he said.

The National Education Health and Allied Workers Union (Nehawu) said it was taken aback by Ramaphosa's decision to grant a salary increase to public office bearers. "We did not expect this decision bearing in mind the challenges confronting the country," Nehawu spokesperson Lwazi Nkolonzi said.

It has been hard to survive in the country with the cost of living going up and workers and ordinary citizens bearing the brunt, Nkolonzi added.

"We don't understand that we have a president taking the decision to increase the salaries of public office bearers amid the high levels of unemployment, inequality and poverty.

"We called on him when the report by the commission suggested public office bearers should be getting 3% not to accept that recommendation."

Workers have not had significant increases in their salaries over the last three years, Nkolonzi said.

"For the government and the president now to implement salary adjustments for all public office bearers goes against what the government has been preaching that 'there is no money in the country' and that workers do not deserve a salary increment above inflation.

"We do not understand where this money comes from when they have been arguing that there is no money."